

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 286

By Ford, O.

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of James A. Hyter of
Memphis, Tennessee.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the untimely passing of James A. Hyter; and

WHEREAS, an acclaimed vocalist whose powerful baritone was considered one of the best known voices in Memphis, James A. Hyter was a legendary and beloved Memphis icon who thrilled, inspired, and entertained generations of residents of the Bluff City; and

WHEREAS, for twenty-one years James Hyter created his own magic and reminded Memphians of their special connection to the Mississippi River as he performed his wonderful rendition of the Jerome Kern classic, *O! Man River*, at the annual Sunset Symphony concert held during the Memphis in May celebration; and

WHEREAS, born in Athens, Alabama, Mr. Hyter arrived in Memphis when he was less than a week old; a graduate of Booker T. Washington High School, he served three years in the United States Army and earned a junior accounting degree from Henderson Business College; and

WHEREAS, a retired insurance salesman, James Hyter worked for many years for Blue Cross/Blue Shield as a marketing representative and field agent before his retirement in 1988; and

WHEREAS, singing in his church choir as an elementary school student, Mr. Hyter would later perform with choirs at Centenary United Methodist Church and St. Luke's United Methodist Church as he became widely known as a singer of spirituals; and

WHEREAS, a versatile vocalist, Mr. Hyter also studied opera and the classics, singing for years with the Memphis Symphony Chorus; in 1979 and 1980, he toured Europe with the Greater Memphis Chorale; and

WHEREAS, James Hyter began one of Memphis' favorite traditions in 1978, the second year of the Memphis in May International Festival's Sunset Symphony, when he was asked to perform *Ol' Man River* with the orchestra. On that magical evening, on the banks of the mighty Mississippi, the people of Memphis reunited with their Mississippi River roots; and

WHEREAS, over the next twenty-one years Mr. Hyter and his tremendous voice became synonymous with Memphis in May, with people coming annually just to hear him as he performed encore after encore; and

WHEREAS, reminding the city of its identity and building a strong feeling of community and sense of pride, James Hyter's annual performances continued through the terms of two symphony conductors, Vincent de Frank and Alan Balter, before ending in 1998; and

WHEREAS, a bronze plaque honoring James Hyter was placed in Tom Lee Park as a lasting tribute and commemoration of those glorious performances, funded by the Shelby County Historical Commission, Friends of J.A. Hyter, and event founder, Martha Ellen Maxwell; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to awards and accolades, Mr. Hyter was honored in 1993 with the establishment of the James A. Hyter Scholarship Fund through Morgan Keegan & Company to provide financial assistance to Mid-South high school graduates or college students; and

WHEREAS, James Hyter was also deeply devoted to his family, and will be greatly missed by his daughter and son-in-law, Beverly Hyter-Ngah and Gideon Ngah, and his sister, Eleanor Hyter Guy; and

WHEREAS, he is also survived by two sisters-in-law, Gloria Grose Cooper and husband Johnnie Cooper, and Lucille Grose; two brothers-in-law, Vernon Grose and wife Dorothy Grose, and Arthur Grose; special niece, Phyllis Hyter and her husband Charles; and a host of other nieces, nephews, cousins, and dear friends; and

WHEREAS, James Hyter leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, seldom do gentlemen of this stature walk among us, and it is fitting that this General Assembly should remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of James A. Hyter, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of James A. Hyter.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.